

Congressman Secured \$485.2 Million from House Panel Last Week to Continue Lockheed Martin's Development of New Helicopter Fleet

Owego, NY - Less than a week after securing the approval of \$485.2 million from the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense for Lockheed Martin in Owego, New York to continue its development of a new presidential helicopter fleet, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today visited the Southern Tier village to outline the next steps for the funds in the congressional process. The congressman, who is a member of the subcommittee, has been working tirelessly for months to obtain the funding needed to continue the much-needed project.

"Now that we've secured the money for the presidential helicopter in the annual defense funding bill, we've changed the dynamic in Washington and everyone is realizing it's a whole new ballgame," Hinchey said. "For months, we've worked tirelessly to help people realize that it was completely illogical to cancel the VH-71 program and last week that hard work paid off with a very critical vote to include continued funding for the project in the bill. Securing final approval of this funding will officially reverse the announced job cuts. Although we're a few steps away from reaching the finish line, we're finally back on track after having been set off course for the past several months. I feel very positive about what has been achieved over the past week and where we're going in the weeks and next couple of months ahead."

The funds, which would be used to continue the research, development, and testing of Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 helicopter, VH-71A, are included in the fiscal year 2010 Defense Appropriations bill. Final approval of the funding would result in the restoration of most, if not all, of the recently announced job cuts associated with the development of the presidential helicopter.

Hinchey said the full House Appropriations Committee is expected to pass the bill that includes the presidential helicopter funding on Thursday, July 23. The full House is then expected to take up the measure the following week. While the congressman acknowledged nothing is official until the bill passes, he said he does not expect many obstacles in the House, but is nevertheless guarding the funding very carefully.

Hinchey has spent the last several months aggressively working to refute false claims about the cost of the presidential helicopter. Some have called for the current Lockheed Martin program

to be scratched because of budget concerns and for a new program to be bid, which Hinchey has repeatedly noted would be far more costly than continuing the project that is already well underway. According to the Congressional Research Service, internal Navy documents estimate that a new presidential helicopter program would cost \$14-21 billion when factoring in the \$4 billion that would have been wasted on the canceled VH-71 program.

Upon learning of plans to propose canceling the VH-71 program, Hinchey and several of his House colleagues offered a proposal in March to President Obama that involved expanding Increment 1 of the helicopter project, which has already produced nine helicopters, including four test articles, that have undergone more than 800 hours of test flights, in lieu of moving onto Increment 2 -- the more costly and technically sophisticated phase of the project. By expanding the number of Increment 1 helicopters, it's estimated that the Navy could purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters on-time and within the original budget plan. If the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense had rejected Hinchey's request for funding last week and the program was canceled, none of the helicopters that have already been constructed could be used, which the congressman noted would be a significant waste of taxpayer money.

Since then, Hinchey has worked closely with his colleagues in the House, particularly House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense Chairman John Murtha (D-PA), to have funding included in the fiscal year 2010 spending bill that would effectively implement that proposed plan to expand Increment 1.

"Everyone who takes the time to learn about the VH-71 program immediately understands what an enormous waste of taxpayer money it would be to cancel it now," Hinchey said. "This helicopter fleet is being constructed by the very smart and talented professionals at Lockheed Martin's Owego headquarters. A new presidential helicopter fleet is well overdue and I'm feeling confident that final approval of these funds is coming soon and that people will be back at work here in Owego in the near future."

As part of his effort to demonstrate to his colleagues, as well as senior Navy and White House officials, that canceling the VH-71 program made no logical sense, Hinchey repeatedly pointed to the fact that scrapping the program now would waste approximately \$4 billion in taxpayer money -- \$3.3 billion already spent on the project as well as early termination fees that the Pentagon would owe Lockheed Martin.

The congressman has also repeatedly highlighted the dramatic need for a new presidential

helicopter fleet. The current fleet of helicopters, which is being stripped down to reduce weight due to safety concerns, has technology that is more than a half century old and was constructed in the 1970's. It also lacks the modern communications equipment needed for the president to securely communicate with senior staff and administration officials on the ground. Further, the current fleet of helicopters has only 10 seats. With a first family of five that includes the president's mother-in-law, and a crew of five that includes Secret Service agents, there is no room for senior staff to travel with the president, which is critical in coordinating information and instructions during national emergencies. Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 version of the new helicopter can seat 14 passengers, which would enable senior White House staff members to travel with the president and his family.

Constitutionally, the House is the first chamber to address annual spending bills. The Senate now needs to take up its own version of the Defense Appropriations bill.